



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany (B) – 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Focus: *Love Builds Up*

word of life

“**Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.**” (1 Corinthians 8:1b NRSV)

Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

We are not the only generation concerned about food and diets. The Corinthians were confused about what they could or should eat. Unlike today, the issue is not about losing weight or keeping healthy. Instead, the first century church was enmeshed in practical issues related to the Jewish dietary restrictions as well as the Gentile religious practices.

1. *What foods, if any, are restricted for Christians to eat or drink?*
2. *Name some food restrictions in other faith traditions.*

As Paul begins this section of his letter “concerning food sacrificed to idols”, we might be inclined to shake our heads and wonder. We clearly hear a clash of cultures and traditions. Paul’s lengthy response indicates this is a significant issue for the church of Corinth. People want and need to know what to eat.

Paul’s response to a specific dietary question can serve as a guide to many theological questions; the answer is not a single piece of knowledge. Instead, love serves as a guide and framework. His words, “knowledge puffs up, but love builds up”, are worth remembering in situations beyond food selections.

3. *Describe a person puffed up with knowledge.*
4. *How might love build up a person?*

Knowledge is not enough. If a person does not know God, and does not pursue a love for God and neighbor, then he or she knows nothing of value. “And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.” (1 Corinthians 13:2 NRSV) Love wins.

Paul clarifies there is only one God who creates us and for whom we exist. Jesus is the embodiment of the one true God. People may choose to worship idols and spend energy creating gods, but God alone is worthy to be known and to worship.

5. *How have you gained knowledge about God?*
6. *What are ways you might learn more?*

As a Jew, Paul spent his early years of his life following Jewish dietary restrictions. In Christ, Paul is freed from the law; this includes the food he eats. Paul is quick to point out his concern for those who are weak in faith. He does not want his personal eating habits to become a stumbling block for those new to the faith. Thus, Paul encourages us to construct our diets based on love – not eating anything which might negatively influence someone else.

7. *How might the food you eat become a stumbling block to someone else?*
8. *Summarize Paul’s message.*

“Food will not bring us close to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.” (1 Corinthians 8:8-9 NRSV)

word *among us*

When Sammy was a child, his family gave him a chemistry kit for his birthday. That's all it took. Sammy was hooked on chemistry. Somewhere in middle school, Sammy began to understand cooking as a chemistry experiment. He loved to add foods together and change their texture and form. Sometimes his concocted recipes were delicious, but not always.

In college, Sammy began reading food labels. His knowledge about food was extensive. It was like he was a walking, talking, eating encyclopedia. The problem was Sammy *loved* to share his knowledge with people as they were eating their meal. He felt obligated to inform people of precisely what was going in their mouths. He shared the facts, strictly the facts, whenever there was food – breakfast, lunch, and supper.

1. *Was Sammy “puffed up with his knowledge”? How so?*
2. *What good was Sammy's knowledge?*

People began to dread when Sammy was around them during a meal. But things changed when his neighbor developed life-threatening food allergies. Sammy was asked to come over daily and help his neighbor select food. At first, Sammy resented the many phone calls and questions. But even Sammy recognized his knowledge was proving to be beneficial in ways he never had imagined. Sammy even adjusted his diet in order to eat meals with his neighbor.

3. *How was Sammy transformed?*
4. *How can knowledge get in the way of relationships?*

faith practice in daily life

Live Among God's People

We might as well admit it. We in the church love to eat. We just do. There is something special when we pause to break bread together. And yet, as we learn more about food allergies and special diets, some church menus have come under review. We in the church are not forced to change, but out of love for others, we adjust.

Thus, it is not uncommon to see fruit bowls and sugar-free cookies beside the rich desserts. Churches often serve grape juice as well as wine at Holy Communion; gluten-free wafers are sometimes provided. If eating a certain food becomes problematic for someone else, then we freely adjust. Love wins.

5. *Give examples of when your church made a change to make others feel more comfortable.*
6. *Have you ever adjusted your dietary practices because of your love for someone else? Explain.*
7. *How do our dietary habits reflect our faith in Christ?*

Prayer

O Christ, fill us with a desire to share love which builds up. Release us from obsessions about food, so we can better serve you. Amen

last word

This week,
try to build up those around you.